
Women Education: A Strategy for Actualization of Education For All in Nigeria

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Abstract

Restrictions placed on women's opportunities and participation has malign consequences for women's health and education even for their social and economic participation. Women as important agents for socio-economic change and transformation in every meaningful society should not be overlooked. The paper recommended among others that all women should be empowered especially in the area of education in order know the value of education so as to contribute in the education of the children.

Keywords: Women empowerment, women education, Participation, education.

All over the world, Education is considered to be a basic human right and a necessary factor in human development. Thus, human capacity development facilitated by strong learning systems is very central to actualization of Education for All in Nigeria. Women Education is a powerful instrument and an engine of nation building and development in Nigeria. It is on record that women constitute half of the world

population and have contributed significantly to the well-being of the human race (Onyebu, 2007). In African Continent and Nigeria society in particular women have always played key roles as mothers, producers, home managers, community organizers, social, cultural and political activists (UNDP Report, 1997:7). The 1991 census figure according to the federal government of Nigeria reveals that the female folk constitute over forty percent (40%) of the nation's population. The numerical strength of the female population in Nigeria as mentioned above is confirming the fact that no meaningful development can take place in the country without the complementary support of the female folk (Haruna, 2011). Women as an important human resource should be fully empowered through quality education. Women empowerment is the process of strengthening the existing capacities and capabilities of the women in the society so as enable them perform efficiently towards improving themselves, their families and the society as a whole. It therefore, involves the provision of enabling environment for their productive and intellectual abilities to be actualized.

Education is an effective instrument for societal development. In this regards, education has been given the deserved attention by all nations of the world. According to Adesina (1985) education is the tool for the integration of the individual effectively into a society so that the individual can achieve self-realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for political, scientific, cultural and technological progress. This is in conformity with Nigeria's national education aims and objectives to which her philosophy of education is linked. The acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, both mental and physical, equipment individual to live and contribute to the development of the society (FRN 2004).

This paper therefore discusses the importance of women education to national development, particularly women position in actualization of Education for All in Nigeria. Recommendations are offered.

Concept of Women Education

Terdood (2008) opined that women education as a type of education received by women, which would make them become aware of themselves and their capacity to exploit their environment. Women education is not only a vital tool but also a catalyst for achieving global Education for All. It involves the training of females (young and old) to acquire certain skills, knowledge ideas, beliefs and attributes to enable them function effectively and contribute meaningful to the development of the society or community to which they belong as members. Mishra (2007) stated that everyone has a right to education which shall be directed to the full development of human dignity and potential with particular attention to women and the girl's education at the centre stage in the struggle for human development. In this paper the term women education denotes all purposeful efforts aimed at imparting education to women that may be formal or

informal, regular or irregular with the aim of repositioning the knowledge, skills and competencies required of them.

Concept of Education For All (EFA)

The Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights clearly stated that:

1. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical education and professional education shall be made generally available.
2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

Education for All clearly requires more than increased finances for educational institution and programmes. It demands the effective mobilization and empowerment of individuals, communities and non-governmental organization towards an “expanded vision” of basic education. The World Conference on EFA on expanded vision of basic education for all people has five components: there are:

- a. Universalizing access to education.
- b. Promoting equity of education provision.
- c. Focusing on the learning, broadening the means and scope of basic education.
- d. Enhancing the environment for learning.
- e. Strengthening partnerships

The above declarations denotes that Education For All must be oriented towards individual liberation from every form of domination and oppression, but it must also socialize the individual to be dynamically involved with others, to assume responsibility. Education For All must be oriented to equality of all and to participation of all in national development. It also stated that basic learning needs of children cannot be met if they remain undernourished, in poor health and in environments that discourage curiosity and inquiry. The education of women and girls was given the most urgent priority in the World Declaration of Education For All. It should improve the living conditions of women in rural areas; assist women to contribute to economic and social development with issues related to quality of life such as health, population and the environment, or to cultural heritage. Action must be taken to ensure that girls and women share equally in education and its benefit.

Challenges to Women Education

In Nigeria likewise other developing countries, women education has been neglected due to various reasons. It is only recently that there was a global outcry about denial of women access to education as violation of fundamental Human Right and hindrance to nation development. The weight of socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes remains very strong and play an important role in preventing women from going to school and women participating in literacy classes. Some religions do not allow girls to be seen in public places or mix up with their opposite sex, so it becomes a problem sending girls to school under such belief system. Such socio-cultural misperception does not help matters with regards to the development of female education in Nigeria. Hence, the phenomenon of gender stereotyping remains a major constraint to the development of education in Nigeria. Women, according to Mangvwat and Abama (1993) are subsumed in the family or are perceived mainly in terms of norms of domesticity. More so, UNICEF (2001) maintained that many parents in Nigeria tend to give priority to education of males over that of females. This is based on cultural feelings that a girl is more of an asset to her husband's family and therefore, the dividend of investing her education will mainly be reaped by her husband and his family members.

Another major factor that prevents women from having access to education is household poverty. Poverty and financial constraints still remain serious problems to the development of women education in Nigeria. The poverty trend in Nigeria is on the increase, for example, UNICEF (2001) pointed that the poverty level in the rural areas of Nigeria from 1980-1996 rose from eighteen to seventy percent (18-70%). Momoh (2002) also noted that over fifty percent (50%) of Nigerians are poor and live below one American Dollar per day. This situation is believed to serve as an impetus to the low income of families, which is further perpetuated by their cultural preference for the education of males over that of females.

In the same vain, Asaolu (2002) asserted that many women did not have the opportunity to go to school not just because of their own making but because of societal ignorance, early marriage, which is predominant in some parts of the country, cultural or economic reasons, polygamy, and poor value attached to education. Uduegholu and Adebola (2010) maintained that early marriage and teenage pregnancy have also militated against women attendance, retention and achievement in schools. Most of the girls who marry early (between ages 12- 15 years) do not go to school and because of their early womanhood, they usually have a lot of children. The UNICEF (2003) postulated that many women have no access to formal education due to certain obstacles like poor governmental gender policies, cultural factors like gender stereotyping, early marriage, pregnancy and family related problems such as poverty, household chores, child labour etc.,. Also Olarewaju (2003) observed that women are impeded from full participation in education by factors which include, economics,

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cultural, social, political religious and educational. Example of some these factors vary from family which include: family's preference of boy educations, girls hawking and trading, distant location of schools, lack of sustained government policies, early marriage and other cultural policies

According to a one time Minister of Education literacy can be the second most worrisome problem after poverty in Nigeria. He further stated that 60% of the illiterates in Nigeria are women. The large percentages of those who do not have any form of education are women and young girls (Lifanda, 2005). Indeed, more women are illiterate because culturally they are seen as second class citizens whose survival does not depend on education and socially, it is believed that educated women will not respect their husband. It is however, believed that the family name is best prevented in the lineage of the male children. Effective education and training is an essential ingredient in directing the path of citizenry more essentially that of young women towards achieving national goals.

In deed, obstacles to female education remain a reality in many African countries, including Nigeria and thus impair women and girl-children from fully enjoying the right of education.

Relevance of Women Education to National Development

For a nation like Nigeria to actually realize its potentials, girls and boys and indeed the whole population of the country must have equal opportunities with equal enrolment ratios at all level of education. Education of women is the most important factor in bringing about changes in their roles status. Women participate better and more actively in the affairs of the society.

Women in Nigeria involved themselves in various occupations to contribute to the socio-economic welfare of their families and society at large. Akhaluola (1998) observed that economic growth is not possible without the understanding cooperation, contribution and active participation of women. He further stressed that women constituted 12.7% of agricultural manpower, 1.6% of professional and sub-professional manpower and 1.4% craftsman. Women in science have contributed to the advancement of the society economically, socially and technologically. Tahir (1999) stated that women contribute about 50% of the agricultural labour force and produce much of our food and crops in Nigeria. Women are into occupations like weaving, soap making, spinning, dyeing, petty trading and farming. Others are involved in the areas of hair dressing, fashion designing, cosmetology, cooking and a host of other mini-vocational activities to contribute not only to their family income, but to the nation at large. It has been argued that despite the above positive contribution of women in various levels of occupation, Nigeria women both in the rural and urban areas are still

facing serious problems that that make the attainment of the objectives of EFA impossible.

The rate of Women participation in the economy is comparatively lower than their male counterpart due to low level of education/school enrolment. Education is one of the most important means to give people knowledge, skills and self confidence necessary to participate actively in the development process of their own society (Mandara 2010). Tahir (1999) further observed that due to women's educationally disadvantaged status and low level participation in education make majority of them to lack the requisite knowledge and skills for effective participation in the political process. Every society, be it simple or complex has its own system of training and educating its young ones. Education for good life has been one the most persistent concern of men throughout history.

Also the United Nations (1995) described women as home makers and center of family. They are also the custodian of socio-cultural and fundamental values of the society and permanent change is often best achieved through them. Women as child bearers, occupy a very sensitive position in the society. For the women folk to be able to efficiently carry out this socio-cultural role in their societies, they must be educated and be conversant the societal dynamism. Education helps citizenry to actively participate in uplifting the social, economic, the social, economic, political and health of the society.

Women education according to Haruna (2011) is one of the indicators that can be used to measure the level of social development of a nation. It is closely related with the most of the demographic variables such as fertility, child mortality, mother and child care, population growth rate and acceptance of family planning. The education and training of women for improvement is imperative because of the roles they play in the modeling and shaping of the children's lives. Educated women are more likely to raise children who are healthier and who are more likely to stay longer in school and are better able to learn quickly. Such mothers reinforce their daughters' educational aspirations. Omololu (1972) in Haruna (2011) maintained that an educated woman is in a better position to appreciate the culture of her country as she can differentiate between the indigenous from foreign cultures and also sift the good from bad cultural values.

Education is a tool of change and nation building all over the world. There is hardly any nation that developed and become secured without education of its citizen especially women. Studies have shown the existence of a link between education and economic development of the nation. For instance, Igbuzor(2006) observed that there is strong relationship between education and development in the sense that schooling

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improves productivity, health and reduces negative features of life like child labour, ignorant behaviours etc and as well as brings about employment. It is for this reason that there are great agitations in recent times for education for all. Also, King and Hill (1992) in Haruna (2011) in their study of two hundred countries confirmed that there is correlation between economic development of a nation and women education. Their finding include that a country with a large gender gap measured as a ratio between past male and female school environment will have lower economic production than another country with the same amount of capital stock and labour force but smaller gender gap in education. Since education a pre-requisite to most forms of remunerative employment, educated and gainfully employed women can contribute greatly to the economic sustenance and development of their respective homes and the nation at large.

Women education is of paramount importance to the nation's body politics. This explains why Mangvwat (1999) opined that education enables women to know their rights, privileges and responsibilities. Politically, every country depends on enlightened citizenry to arrive at very meaningful decisions that will guide it to achieve its various political objectives and agenda. Thus education helps to enhance the women's participation in politics which may help to reduce the phenomena of men domination to the nation's body politics which is a good way of promoting gender equality in Nigeria.

The relevance of women education to the nutritional and health care of children cannot be overstressed. Mallum and Kemba (2003) observed that educated mothers especially at higher level have the opportunity to positively influence child nutrition. This perception may not be unconnected with the general impression that an educated woman has better background knowledge of food and nutrition and their relevance to the health and general well being of children. An educated and gainfully employed woman may be in better economic position to augment the family's nutrition needs and requirements.

Women Education and the Actualization of Education For All

Women education should serve as a strategy to actualize Education For All in Nigeria. Some of the ways which women education will help to achieve EFA are as follows:

1. Nation Building

Olayiwola (2010) as quoted by Iloh and Obiekea (2011) described education of female children as critical to building a nation of responsible citizens. He further urged parents to give adequate education to girl-children, for well trained women are invaluable assets to every nation. Acquisition of good knowledge, skills and values through well articulated education by the womenfolk would stand the country in good position to achieve the nation's objective of EFA. In addition, if

women are educated and gainfully employed, they can assist their husbands in some measure to finance their home and education of their children. UNESCO (1998) stated that increased educational opportunities for women boost development. The potential contribution of educated and trained women to labour force and importance of their education in the improvement of the family welfare and planning are factors still underestimated in national development. Abawaua and Fanyam (2006) also have same opinion by stating that when women are encouraged to go to school, they will be gainfully employed after graduation and they will become sources of income to their families and also help in salvaging and sustaining the degenerating state of the nation. Education accounts highly for the survival of man hence the Education For All Global Monitoring Report (2002) asserted that the relationship between education and development is so important that education is a tool of development as it is conventionally reflected in the areas of productivity, health and reduction of negative tendency of life such as child labour, ignorant behaviours etc and as well as brings about empowerment. Education of women will minimize hawking during school hours.

2. Family Welfare

An educated woman helps in the fulfillment of her marital obligation. With her education, she can take care of her home, husband and children. There is no doubt that her education will help her read about health care, nutrition, body changes, modern household equipment, etc which will enable her perform creditably well in her God-given responsibility to the home and the society at large. The woman is the first educator of her children. She is the one mostly at home and close to the children. She teaches them how to respect elders and some simple good habits that would help them to fit into the society as they grow. She can afford to spend her 'last kobo' for the education of her children. In the words of Dadu'ut (2009)' a woman can sacrifice all to educate her children to be useful for themselves and to the entire nations' development". An educated woman will be able to help her children with their school assignment. She may also go beyond that to further enlighten them in their school work, pay visits to their children schools from time to time and attend Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting and enquire about the academic performance of their children.

3. Maintenance of Good Family Health

Educated women maintain healthy condition of their children. Since she is educated, she can be aware of all the harmful conditions that can manifest during pregnancy and childbirth through most of enlightenment campaigns which are transmitted either through the radio, television, newspapers etc. she can also be informed about basic health care facilities and will be in a god position to assist other women maintain and improve their own health and that their families.

4. Mentoring, Tutoring, and Counseling of their Children

Women as mothers, teachers, counselors and confidants of the children play a very crucial roles in children development. In fact, the roles of women in education of their children need not to be overemphasized. Educated women help their children to learn. As a mentor she sets the pace, she is an adviser, a counselor, a guide, a teacher, a tutor, guru etc. The highly acclaimed saying goes thus: “if you educate a woman you educate a nation” it is an established fact that investment in woman is of great value and not only to her as an individual but to the wider society. It is said that the children of educated mothers are more likely to succeed in school more so than if the father is educated. It is almost impossible to conceive of the children of an educated woman being illiterates. Mothers are more responsive to the education of their children and wards. Women need to be appropriately educated to direct, guide, counsel and answer certain critical questions and issues of life from the children. There are issues which children may not like to discuss with outsiders, mothers are always readily available and close to children.

5. Socio-Cultural and Moral Values

The crucial role of socialization of the child is highly relevant to the development of appropriate values and behaviour. Ejiogu (2002) opined that morality implies goodness, integrity, virtue, virtuousness, righteousness, purity of heart and mind, moral, character, honesty probity and fair mindedness. Morality functions to guide the conduct of persons and human groups in such a way that it constitutes an institution or shared system of expectations for regulating behavior. Virtues and values are essential parts of society because they provide the rational foundation for human conduct. If the mother is an illiterate, ignorant and not well informed about the values and dynamic nature of human society, she cannot carry out her function successfully. As the child’s first environment, the home (woman) socializes the child to the cultural norms, values, moral codes etc, of the family and the society. She also sets the pattern for the acceptable attitude towards people, things and life in general (Modo, 2002). Krishnan (2007) also affirmed that teaching children ethics, moral standards and values start right at home and this done from very early age. Women devote more time to the children. Mothers tell their children stories with moral endings, give them examples of great men and women and also daily experiences of peoples who have succeeded by being ethically upright.

Against the background of the points mentioned and discussed above and in view of the position of women as partner in progress, the education for all cannot be achieved without proper mobilization and the contributions of educated womenfolk.

Conclusion

The overall impact of gender bias, cultural norms and practices has entrenched a feeling of inferiority in women and placed them at a disadvantaged position in the society. Education is the imparting and acquiring of knowledge through teaching and learning especially at a school or similar institution like the home. Naturally, woman is mother and this position makes her to be closer to newborn babies than any other person in the family. She is the first teacher of the child, the maintainer and sustainer of the home, the peacemaker, the symbol of beauty and major moulder of the character of the children. Therefore, whatever type of education received by her should directly or indirectly determine her contribution to her home and nation at large.

For quicker actualization of EFA, compulsory education and training for all the citizenry especially women who are the active nation builders should be encouraged, since one requires necessary knowledge and skills in order to be gainfully employed or to be qualified to help self to break the yoke of ignorance, poverty, hunger and all other barriers in life. Equality considerations are very important in any strategy which aims to lead to Education for All. Nwogu (2009) stated that since women are seen as home and nation builder, any government that wants to excel and meet the needs of her citizens without strategic plans for women seem to be building a castle in the air.

Recommendations

In view of above discussion on the role of women education for the actualization of Education for All, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Government should give full support to the implementation of Education For All as specified in the national policy on education.
2. The issue of equal education opportunity and Education for All (EFA) as proposed in the National Policy on Education and also as endorsed by the Pan African Conference on girl-child education should be taken more serious. Girls should be given the support and encouragement to read courses in all areas of their choice as this will enable them contribute meaningfully to overall welfare of family and society at large.
3. There must be adequate mobilization of female to over-haul of the inferiority complex that has locked their minds.
4. Women on their part should see themselves as strong and not weaker sexes as they are regarded and as such, be ready to attain higher level of education like men.
5. Government should create job opportunity for educated women to encourage them and discourage illiteracy and ignorance.
6. Government should abolish and impose punishment on defaulter as to discourage the activities that do not allow children especially females to go to school.

7. Traditional rulers and religious leaders should be used to campaign for essentials of basic education more especially for women to contribute national development of the society.

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